



UTOPIA: A COMMITTED CINEMA BETWEEN PASSION AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

A COOPERATIVE MODEL BUILT ON FREEDOM AND INVOLVEMENT

On the occasion of the *Ville des Langues* festival, we met Fred, one of the members of the Utopia cinema in Avignon, an iconic venue in the local cultural landscape. More than just a screening space, Utopia defines itself as a place for reflection, sharing, and engagement.

From the very first moments of the conversation, one thing is clear: the way things work here is far from conventional. “Utopia is a cooperative,” Fred explains. “We have a certain freedom, and we’re all versatile.” Within the team, some employees are also partners, actively involved in decision-making. This horizontal structure encourages strong commitment and a valued freedom of action within the field.

Daily life at the cinema follows a unique rhythm, structured around the well-known Utopia gazette, a true in-house cultural publication. “The first weeks are fairly calm, we watch films for upcoming programming. Then things pick up as we start writing texts and preparing for release and distribution.” Weekends remain the busiest times, although attendance also depends on the seasons: “As soon as the weather is nice, people go less to the cinema.”

PROGRAMMING AS A FORM OF CULTURAL COMMITMENT



What truly sets Utopia apart is its approach to programming. Every film is viewed beforehand, often within a national Utopia network where impressions are shared and discussed collectively. “We try to support films we find interesting, sometimes less visible ones.” The goal is not to follow trends, but to offer cinema that is both demanding and accessible.

However, a balance must be maintained. Independent and unsubsidized, the cinema must deal with economic realities:

“We have to find a compromise between the films we love and those that will attract audiences.” It’s a delicate equation, made even more challenging by a difficult context for theaters. Since the Covid crisis, attendance has struggled to return to previous levels. “Streaming platforms, purchasing power, the multiplication of content... it all has an impact.” Not to mention local competition and the sharing of film copies.



Despite this, Fred remains confident: “Cinema isn’t going to die. There’s an experience in theaters that you can’t replace.”

For him, technological changes are part of cinema’s history, but the essential lies elsewhere. He also believes that artificial intelligence will not threaten cinema: “What matters is what people have to say. A machine has nothing to say.”

DEFENDING A LIVING AND MEANINGFUL CINEMA



At Utopia, this belief is reflected in a strong editorial stance. No sale of confectionery, affordable ticket prices, numerous educational initiatives with schools, film education workshops, partnerships with associations... The venue embraces a committed vision of culture: “We see cinema as something that can empower people, make them think, and create a sense of community.”

During the Avignon Festival, the cinema adapts. While its usual audience tends to turn more toward theater, Utopia offers a specific program, with daily discussions as part of “Territoires cinématographiques.” Directors, actors, and theater companies come to share their favorite films, creating bridges between disciplines.

When asked what he enjoys most about his job, Fred answers: “This freedom, the possibility to propose, to organize, to defend films.” He speaks enthusiastically about the debates organized around screenings, the encounters with audiences, and this constant desire to give meaning to each showing. “We stand by our choices. What we do is very concrete, very real.”

At a time when cultural habits are evolving, Utopia continues to carve its own path, staying true to a simple yet essential idea: making cinema a place for life, thought, and connection.

